New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1955

The next scheduled theatre opening in New York is in September; issue containing complete reviews will be mailed as usual the following week.

Volume XVI, Number 14 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of June 27, 1955

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Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"Almost Crazy"

Daily Mirror

June 21, 1955

'Almost Crazy' New Revue At Longacre Theatre

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"Almost Crazy" is the kind of show that used to arrive in the Spring. Full of good intentions, but not very good. In our opinion, it's better to welcome them then, for they seem infinitely more tedious on a hot Summer night. But John S. Cobb brought his revue to the Longacre Monday evening, and there was nothing to do but look it over.

THE CAST impressed us as being much better that the material it had to work with. The sketches were really sketchy. Some of them were blackouts that hardly lit up before they blacked out. Others were strung out far too long. And most of them lacked wallopy punch-lines, to make their points and end on that ever-so-valuable big laugh.

As for the songs, they were on the pedestrian side. Not unpleasant to listen to, but hardly calculated to set you singing of a morning under your shower. The dances were rather routine.

The major portion of the material is attributed to Portia Nelson, James Shelton, Raymond Taylor, Hal Hackady and Robert A. Bernstein. Miss Nelson and Shelton, we happen to know, are amusing people. Shelton has good wit. Yet, somehow, their personalities and viewpoints seldom came effectively across the Longacre's footlights.

YOU'VE READ frequent salutes to Kay Medford in this space. We believe she's one of the most gifted and versatile troupers hereabouts. But she had to fight heroically for her laughs at the Longacre. She was at her best, we thought, in Bernstein's "If I Knew You Were Coming," a spoof on international infidelity.

Actor Shelton usually teamed with the clever Kay in the skits, and gave her able support. Perhaps the best of the songs were "Don't Bait for Fish You Can't Fry," sung by rotund ingratiating Babe Hines, with a second-act reprise called "More Fish," delivered by Karen Anders, an attractive blonde with a nice throwaway style.

Miss Hines, ensconced in a rocking chair, rendered easily "Easy," which also fell pleasantly on the ears. The first-nighters liked "Down to Eartha," an eccentric number smoothly done by Betty Colby.

OTHER YOUTHFUL performers making the most of their opportunities in this shaky showcase were Kevin Scott, Alvin Beam, Nick Dana, Mildred Hughes, Vincent Beck, Lorna Del Maestro, Joan Morton, Rita Tanno, Ron Cecill, Phyllis Dorne, William Skipper, Ann York and Richard Towers.

In justice to Cobb, we must say that an enthusiastic first-night audience roared robustly and applauded lustily. It was evident that they liked the revue and the nice people in it. But, frankly, we think you would be almost crazy to pay almost six dollars to see "Almost Crazy."

"ALMOST CRAZY"

Musical revue with words and music mostly by Portia Nelson, Raymond Taylor and James Shelton; sketches mostly by Mr. Shelton, Hal Hackaday and Robert A. Bernstein; settings by John Robert Lloyd; costumes by Stanley Simmons; choreography by William Skipper; sketches directed by Christopher Hewett; entire production staged by Lew Kesler; presented by John S. Cobb at the Longacre Theatre, June 20, 1955, with the following cast: Kay Medford, James Shelton, Babe Hines, Betty Colby, Karen Anders, Kevin Scott, Alvin Beam, Nick Dana, Mildred Hughes, Gloria Smith, Vincent Beck, Lorna Del Maestro, Joan Morton, Rita Tanno, Richard Towers, Ron Cecil, Phyllis Dorne, William Skipper and Ann York.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

June 21, 1955

THEATER

'Almost Crazy'

By WALTER F. KERR

THERE seems to be a growing impression that whenever you've got just enough songs, dances, and production numbers to fill out two and a half hours, you've got a revue.

The new show at the Longacre has the music, all right—it's not great, but dancers can dance to it—and it has three or four eminently agreeable personalities ready and able to pick up the conductor's cues.

* * *

It has Kay Medford, for instance. The management has done Miss Medford a severe disservice by commanding that she try to get laughs out of nonexistent laugh lines by growling, snarling, and generally shredding the lining of her throat, but it's a pleasure to watch this girl's weary eye and faintly curled lip, anyway. Miss Medford has only to walk down a flight of stairs and right back up again—it's her total contribution to the opening number—to remind you that she is an efficient satirist. And sometimes just the look of her—in a ragged shawl against a Russian backdrop, say, or whacking croquet balls around an English drawing-room—is exhilarating.

* * *

Then there are some less well-known folk who aren't amateurs at all. Betty Colby is a handsome brunette with a high-powered and highly pleasing singing voice ("Where Is the Girl?" is a felicitous ballad for her style), Kevin Scott is an unusually versatile juvenile (he's glib and cheerful in the sketches, rousing enough in his before-the-curtain songs), and Karen Anders is a platinum charmer with a smile that inspires confidence and a leer that leads to other things. Between times, a jovial mbuntain named Babe Hines is available to teeter rhythmically, snap her fingers, and make unbelievably shrill sounds from behind her teeth.

* * *

But the way "Almost Crazy" is fashioned, these attractive entertainers simply seem to be following one another at an audition. There's a number done at dressing-tables. There's a number done at a bar. There's a tropical bit with tom-toms, a moody job in which a high-born lady moons over a peasant in the vineyard, a frolic at the seashore in old-fashioned bathing suits, a lazy tune in a rocking-chair, and a fast razzle-dazzle in which the maximum number of chorus girls and boys pass each other going up and down steps while waving their white-gloved hands. In short, it's one familiar dodge after another, with little or no point of view to bind them into a shapely package.

* * *

To make matters rather more disappointing, sketch-writers James Shelton, Hal Hackaday and Robert A. Bernstein have found a number of reasonable targets and then shot woefully wild. A glance at a TV program called "This Is a Living?" in which a silent-screen actress is hauled from her mouldy retirement to face the people who've made her career ought to have been juicy going. Apart from Miss Medford's struggle to keep a ratty pelt on her shoulders, it's drearier than the game it is presumably hunting. Another TV jab in which a variety of neurotic panelists manage to broadcast from their cots is merely inexplicable. And a four-nation parlay in which military men come home to their unexpectedly enlarged households descends to the line "That is a lote of crepe, Suzette."

* * *

It may be a mercy that the sketches are few. But the absence of comedy simply means that the singers are going to have to grab new costumes—these are trimly designed for a scant budget by Stanley Simmons—and pick up the beat once more. Choreographer William Skipper has been valiant in thinking up new patterns for flailing arms, and he appears personally to lend considerable excitement to a routine tune called "Here Come the Blues." His basic task, though, isn't much different from that of a television director condemned to devising new production ideas for songs that have been on the air forever and have used up all the gimmicks. After a while, things just get strange.

The New York Times

June 21, 1955

Theatre: Summer Show

'Almost Crazy,' Revue, Opens at Longacre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

"ALMOST CRAZY," which opened at the Longacre last evening, will probably appeal most to people who have difficulty in hearing. It looks better than it sounds.

A light revue designed for the summer trade, it is populated by attractive young people who are all in good humor. For instance, Karen Anders, an aureate blonde, with a wide smile and about the finest mouthful of teeth in the business: she looks great. Or, for another instance, Babe Hines, round and capacious with snappy eyes and an enormous grin: she looks as if she were brimming over with fun.

But the material of "Almost Crazy" is not up to the looks and good nature of the cast. It is composed of songs, mostly by Portia Nelson, Raymond Taylor and James Shelton, that sound like standard theatre music. "Explain this thing called love," says one of the most passionate lyrics. "It was made in heaven above," the explanation declares. Even Babe Hines' songs, which ought to be epochal to match her build, are perfunctory floor-show stuff.

The sketches are mostly by James Shelton, Hal Hockaday and Robert A. Bernstein. With the exception of a dead-pan gag about the riches of Rodgers and Hammerstein, the sketches are no improvement on the music. The literary quality of "Almost Crazy" may be gauged by the fact that the best sketch consists of some imitations by Kay Medford. On the whole, Miss Medford is not at her best in this show. She is too self-consciously funny. But her imitations of Bette Davis, Tallulah Bankhead, Miriam Hopkins, Barbara Stanwyck Louella Parsons and other women of grandeur are well written and well acted.

Exceptions to the mediocrity of a routine summer show can be sustained as follows: Betty Colby can sing and act like a professional. She contributes an amusing parody of Eartha Kitt, and sings a romantic song, "Where Is the Girl?" charmingly. Kevin Scott, who sings as her partner in this number, has an excellent voice and a pleasant personality, and deserves a good future in the musical theatre.

And this column also takes kindly to at least one line in a satiric song called "I Can Live Without It"—meaning love. It is the theme song of a poor little rich girl who finds money completely satisfying. "Who needs happiness?" the lyric asks. "Can it buy money?" The switch in moral values is thought-provoking.

"Almost Crazy" supplies quite a lot of dancing under the direction of William Skipper, who also sings and dances in person. The ballets share the routine spirit of the whole production. With all proper appreciation of the attractive looks and the good-nature of the performers, "Almost Crazy" lacks originality and distinction.

Journal American

June 21, 1955

Young People Work Hard

Revue Has Appealing Numbers But Sketches Spoil Evening

By JOHN McCLAIN

A REVUE IS an extremely exacting form of entertainment. Naturally you've got to have good music and dancing, or you're nowhere, but much more important are the sketches. It's taken for granted you've got good people in the show, but you've got to give them something to do between numbers.

That's where "Almost Crazy," a new musical which opened at the Longacre Theatre last night, most flagrantly fell on its face.

Everything starts off with a promising opening and segues into a blackout involving the financial pulchritude of Rodgers and Hammerstein. It even stays aloft through the efforts of Babe Hines, hauling off on a number called "Don't Bait for Fish You Can't Fry." But then it gets into a pretentious bit of drama in which one of the characters is called "Mary Smiles Winter," and you've had it.

Wasted Talent

This is what happens all evening long. There are appealing individual numbers, here and there, and some pleasant refrains and many energetic and prepossessing young people working hard to score, but along comes that deadly lull labeled "sketch" and everything stops dead.

The most wasted talent of all is Kay Medford's. She is projected into a series of situations, singularly lacking in ingenuity, designed to ridicule the current scene. Yes, there's even a take-off on "What's My Line," with Davy Crockett, and Miss Medford coming on for the finish as Greta Garbo, the mystery guest. That will give you a rough idea.

Her good moments are muffled by the inability of the writers to get her on or off when required. She appears in one spot, labelled "Burlesque," and is snatched off the premises before the audience can identify her. Another sketch ends while she is standing onstage with nothing to say. Here they have a wonderful comedienne and she is allowed to languish.

Perhaps too much is made here of Miss Medford, but it struck me that this was the keynote of the evening. I liked Betty Colby, Karen Anders, Kevin Scott and most of the people involved in the musical side of the situation. And, as posted heretofore, I thought Babe Hines was exceptional.

I just didn't think that the producers managed to put some quite acceptable music and dancing together with enough engaging corollary skits to make a rewarding evening. And, since Miss Medford was required to carry the burden, she and her material can be called to task.

Miss Medford deserves a better fate. First of all she should be in a show whose authors come up with a better name than "Almost Crazy."

DAILY NEWS

June 21, 1955

'Almost Crazy' Has Lots of Zest

By JACK IAMS

As you might expect of a revue opening at this time of year, "Almost Crazy" has much the quality of a show gotten up at a summer resort—a resort that happened to have a number of unusually gifted young people around, plus a couple of seasoned pros.

That is to say, it has a youthful zest, a sparkle, a vitality, that are particularly evident in the dance numbers, in which the whole company participates. On the other hand, there is a vague sense of amateurishness about the proceedings which, up to a point, has a kind of charm, but which, particularly in the sketches, tends to leave the spectator wondering just what is meant to be going on.

It is only fair to add that last night's audience, to pursue the summer resort simile, acted as if it was related to everybody in the show and was ready to cheer its head off for them.

Babe Hines Is Fine

An outstanding exception to the foregoing, and, to my way of thinking, the outstanding personality of the show, was Babe Hines, a veteran who dates back to Lew Leslie's "Blackbirds." With that round, jovial face that justifies her name, mischievous

"Almost Crazy"—*continued*

eyes and throaty voice, Miss Hines really turned it on for a couple of numbers, particularly with the song "Don't Bait for Fish You Can't Fry." For my money, there wasn't enough of Miss Hines.

The other outstanding performer of the evening was Kay Medford, but she was pretty badly handicapped by the sketches, in which she carried most of the load. Miss Medford did a lot with what she had, but that strident, piercing voice, which was very funny the first time you heard it, began to get wearing as time went on. The trouble with the sketches was that they lacked wit. They had a rough good humor, but when you undertake things like a parody of TV's "This Is Your Life," you need more than that.

In particular, a long skit about a soldier coming home to a wife and unexpected baby, as envisioned happening to four different nationalities, fell with a singularly dull thud. It also hurt the pace of the show, which up till then had been moving with remarkable speed.

2 Attractive Singers

To get back to more cheerful things, Karen Anders knocked off some excellent song numbers, and so did Betty Colby, especially in a number with Kevin Scott called "Where Is the Girl?" (I wish, though, that when Mr. Scott ties his necktie in the course of this song, he would tie it the way most of us do, instead of in a Windsor knot.)

And Joan Morton does some fine, lissome dancing, especially in a rather elaborate piece called "Chat Noire," with Miss Morton as the Chat against an attractive Paris setting. All the settings, in fact, were pleasing, especially one for a sketch about two old ladies that looked like a Mary Petty drawing. John Robert Lloyd was responsible.

"Mother's Day"

The songs, "mostly" by Portia Nelson, Raymond Taylor and James Shelton, were pleasant enough, though I hardly think any of them will prove memorable. One called "Mother's Day," which keeps turning up throughout the show, done by three attractive young ladies who just wander in singing it, seemed the hardiest.

If some of those sketches could be tightened up, or possibly thrown out altogether, "Almost Crazy," with its pace and sparkle, would be very acceptable fun.

New York Post

June 21, 1955

By Frances Herridge

'Almost Crazy' Was Almost Too Easy

Everything jelled quickly—too quickly—in getting "Almost Crazy" to the Longacre last night. John Cobb, 24, got the idea suddenly only 11 weeks ago in a Village night club. He assembled writers, composers, lyricists—not one, but several of each—and a bright young cast for his first show. Oklahoma millionaire Tom Grimmett wandered into an audition and put up the $75,000 needed. Director Lew Kesler whipped the revue in shape without an out-of-town tryout. And last night it burst forth in all its young energy.

The only trouble is the revue itself never quite jells. The sketches have funny moments, but fall flat in time for each curtain. The dances are never as sexy as they are meant to be, and the songs never as stirring. The cast just doesn't have the little extra it takes to carry a full-length revue.

Kay Medford gives the show most of its laughs. In "If I Knew You Were Coming," cleverest of the sketches, she is genuinely funny as Barbara Bel Geddes of "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof." ("This house ain't got no windows, but I'm a Method actress, so I don't care.") She is also skillful mimicking Tallullah, Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwyck and other such in "Love Me or Leave"—itself a spoof of the Doris Day movie and "Marty."

Broadway and Hollywood get more than their usual ribbing. There's a lively dance in "House of Flowers" style, and a pigtailed poisoner from "Bad Seed." Skits include Mary Smiles Winter of silent film days, Greta Garbo with hat, and, of course, Marilyn Monroe—this one carrying her own skirt blower around with her.

Babe Hines, the only oldtimer in the cast—she goes back to "Blackbirds of 1926"—has a knowing way with a song, but has little in the way of material. Best is Portia Nelson's "Don't Bait for Fish You Can't Fry."

Newcomer Karen Anders gets a lot of attention with her Monroe hair tint, and she ad-libs effectively in a song about a rich girl without love, "who gets her thrill reading daddy's will."

Versatile James Shelton not only provides sketches and lyrics, but carries most of the male comedy. Betty Colby is sweet-faced and sweet-voiced but just shouldn't attempt the Eartha Kitt take-off. Nor is Joan Morton any more sexy as a Colette Marchand-type feline in "Chat Noire."

Kevin Scott sings nicely, and there is a snappy opening number to the effect that "Everything's Gonna Be Much Worse Next Year."

Credit Robert A. Bernstein and James Shelton with the best of the sketches. But even the best don't develop into anything. And the worst are dully pointless.

William Skipper's dances are competent but have little invention. John Robert Lloyd provides economical sets that serve well enough.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

June 21, 1955

New Revue At Longacre Is 'Crazy'

There is little better to do on a warm evening than sit in the shadings of pleasant voices and listen to cool music. This was partially the goal of "Almost Crazy," a musical revue that had its beginning last night at the Longacre Theater.

Its major target was the rowdy and the raucous. At times the revue tried so hard it punctured the target beyond repair. And at other moments a surprising laugh crept in and a pleasant voice worked a wonder.

Kay Medford brought a fine sense of comic timing to material that seemed a trifle shabby for her talents. Karen Anders braced the evening almost every time it needed a prop.

The pleasure of songs was left to three entertainers who knew what they were about. Betty Colby and Kevin Scott teamed handsomely in "Where Is the Girl?" whose music and lyrics are the work of James Shelton. An easy-going lyric called, appropriately, "Easy," was done to a fine, slow turn by Babe Hines. Again, the author's credit goes to Mr. Shelton, who worked ardently in broad comedy sketches.

The proceedings are hazily concocted for the most part and even for a revue seem jumbled. If a tumultuous striving at gaiety is what you seek on a warm summer evening, then "Almost Crazy" is your cup of iced tea.

SAUL LEVINSON.

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"Seventh Heaven"
"Once Upon a Tailor"

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Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"Seventh Heaven"

New York Post

May 27, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

Music Version of 'Seventh Heaven'

This would have been a fine time for a good, frank, shamelessly romantic musical play, just to bring a vigorous and entertaining theatrical season to a happily sentimental conclusion. But I greatly fear that "Seventh Heaven," which opened last night at the ANTA Theater, isn't quite the show to meet the challenging requirements. Victor Young had just the right idea in his score, filling it with melodies that are proudly and fearlessly old-fashioned and, as the highbrows say, "corny." They also have another virtue. They're engagingly tuneful songs.

Getting right down to it, you can't say that the book by Victor Wolfson and Stella Unger isn't fearlessly old-fashioned and corny, too. But here I think there's an unfortunate difference. The libretto has most of the trappings of romantic and sentimental musical comedy without capturing the proper spirit. Perhaps the authors tried to do too many things at once. They have put in, after a fashion, the romance and sentiment, tossed in a bit of pseudo-religion and then added some sex comedy, and the combination is a little uncomfortable.

The Framework

It seems a particular pity, because they had a satisfactory working model to develop. As I recall it, Austin Strong's original drama wasn't much of a play, but it did have a certain romantic charm, and, in the days of the silent films, it was turned into quite a delightful sentimental vehicle for Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell. The framework is still there, but the simple basic appeal of the story, it seems to me, is lost rather hopelessly, and the right mood, always present in the score, departs as soon as the narrative reappears.

Anyway, in some manner or other, Diane, the sweet little flower of the Paris slums, still descends into the sewers to find her lover, Chico, the dashing sewer worker and atheist, and Chico once more takes her to his "heaven," up seven flights in a Montmartre tenement. Again that earlier World War rears its head, and Chico goes off to become a hero and returns blind but no longer an atheist. Diane, who had come to have some doubts of the goodness of God, has her faith restored, and Boule, the taxi driver, philosophizes. But it isn't very touching.

The Songs

To get back to Mr. Young's score, I don't think he is much helped by Miss Unger's lyrics and it's possible the music couldn't be called distinguished, but the songs never fail to be attractive and romantically winning. A quick glance at my program brings back to mind "If It's a Dream," "Where Is That Someone For Me?" and "A Remarkable Fellow" as songs I especially liked. What is important is that matter of catching and retaining the right mood. Sets and costumes are properly colorful, and I enjoyed a second-act dance by Chita Rivera.

The romantic leading roles are in the hands of Gloria DeHaven and Ricardo Montalban. Miss DeHaven is pretty and appealing and Mr. Montalban is dashing, but I suspect the two stars are rather lacking in the electric quality that might have brought the love story to dramatic life. I thought Kurt Kasznar as the philosophical cabman, Robert Clary as an amiable pickpocket, and Scott Merrill as a police inspector captured the proper quality more completely. And last night's chief audience enthusiasm went to Gerianne Raphael, Patricia Hammerlee and Miss Rivera as a trio of tarts. I wish the show lived up to the music.

"SEVENTH HEAVEN"

Musical comedy with book by Victor Wolfson and Stella Unger, music by Victor Young, lyrics by Miss Unger, based upon the play "Seventh Heaven" by Austin Strong; settings and costumes by Marcel Vertes; musical director Max Meth; choreography by Peter Gennaro; lighting by Feder; staged by John C. Wilson; presented by Gant Gaither and William Bacher at the ANTA Theatre, May 26, 1955. The cast:

Boule.....Kurt Kasznar
Camille.....Gerrianne Raphael
Collette.....Patricia Hammerlee
Fifi.....Chita Rivera
Mme. Suze.....Beatrice Arthur
Father Chevillon.....
Malcolm Lee Beggs
Diane.....Gloria DeHaven
1st Sailor.....Philip Cook
2d Sailor.....Leo Kayworth
Policeman.....Walter Brandin
1st Nun.....Nanette Vezina
2d Nun.....Joy Marlene
Street Cleaner.....Ralph Quist
Organ Grinder..William Carson
1st Senegalese..Ray Saint Jacques
2d Senegalese...James E. Wall
Dandy.....John Carter
Baker Boy.....Joseph Flynn
Housewife.....Jeanne Schlegel
Artist.....Jimmy White
Midinette.....Nancy Lynch
Fleegle (The Rat)...Robert Clary
Inspector.....Scott Merrill
Gobin.....David Collyer
Vulmir.....Ferdi Hoffman
Chico.....Ricardo Montalban
French Official...George Burles
Flower Vendor..Winifred Ainslee

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

May 27, 1955

Gloria in New Role In 'Seventh Heaven'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The lovers in "Seventh Heaven," Diane and Chico, have been capturing the public's imagination for a good many years in various forms.

Now they return once more in song, at the ANTA Theater. They exist in a brilliantly colorful, sentimentally musical atmosphere. Paris of the first war is a teeming place with a carnival atmosphere.

In the midst of its lusty hilarity, the romance of the little street walker and the sewer cleaner is like a faint humming while the band goes by.

There is little point in comparing older versions of "Seventh Heaven" with this one. Where the focus was on Diane and Chico in the past, it is now on the background.

Search for Security.

There never was much plot to this one. Like most ladies, whatever their professions, Diane wants security. Chico is intent on proving what a hell of a fellow he is.

They live together platonically, which is a surprise to all their friends. Comes the war, and they marry by self declaration. Chico appears in a promised dream to Diane. But he fails to return. Long after their friends are reunited, he comes back to his waiting.

It takes a good deal of tender acting and radiant personality to make this one come across. The musical "Seventh Heaven" does not give its stars much to work with in the way of solid scenes.

Gloria De Haven, a pretty girl with a haunting voice, must look gloomy most of the time.

Handles Lines.

Some casual direction takes her away from the microphones at lamentable moments. Given meaty lines, she handles them well. But there is not much room for development of character.

Ricardo Montalban is handsome, and a presentable enough singer. As Chico he cannot prove much, except by describing himself between the production numbers.

Kurt Kasznar, as the taxi driver, has the real gift of theater projection for his brief moments. Robert Clary also comes off in shining style as the little pickpocket.

All around Paris, too, is a trio of fantastic ladies of the evening, who are really the show's most striking virtue. Patricia Hammerlee is terrifying as a baby-talking, high-kicking Medusa. Gerriane Raphael is a sinister red head.

Remarkable Dancer.

Chita Rivera is the pale third of the trio, and a most remarkable dancer. Along with her girl friends, she performs one of the show's really original items, a mambo can can, "Love, Love, Love."

Beatrice Arthur is a forceful headmistress of the girls and the neighborhood.

Of the Victor Young score, "If It's a Dream" sounds surrest to hit the top ranks.

The scenery and costumes by Vertes are gay and have real flare, invoking the feel of Paris without being literal.

DAILY NEWS
May 27, 1955

'Seventh Heaven' as a Musical Is Nice but Not Terribly Heavenly

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Austin Strong's old tear-jerker about a Parisian sewer employe and a girl who works upstairs in a cabaret, "Seventh Heaven," was given another revival last evening at the ANTA Theatre—this time as a musical. It is quite good-looking, with sets and costumes by Vertes, but otherwise it doesn't strike me as being very interesting. Victor Young's music and Stella Unger's lyrics are, I would say, faintly passable, and are given passable renditions by Gloria DeHaven, Ricardo Montalban and others. And the plot, which was sticky enough in 1922, has not come unstuck after all these many years; it was and is an unbelievable romance.

Attractive Dances

This innocent girl and this subterrancan laborer fall in love and conduct their own wedding ceremony, which consists mainly of each saying to the other, "Okay." Then he goes off to World War I, which was only shortly after the Custer Massacre but not so exciting, and when he comes back he is blind but she still loves him.

In the new musical version, this romance is interrupted by some attractive dances staged by Pete Gennaro. I don't think Miss DeHaven or Mr. Montalban has a song that anybody could remember but themselves, and Kurt Kasznar and Robert Clary—the latter being the only living quarter-pint baritone—seem similarly stymied in supporting roles.

A musical version of "Seventh Heaven" has been talked about for many years, and now we have it. Now that we have it, there isn't much to do about it, for it just doesn't have the style, the class, the cast and the appeal to make it first-rate.

Journal American
May 27, 1955

Song and Dancer Shot With Charm

By JOHN McCLAIN

A new musical, bearing the name and some of the situations from Austin Strong's "Seventh Heaven" made its bow at the ANTA Theatre last night and proved to be a warm and nostalgic experience, an unpretentious and sprightly blend of mirth, melody and terpsichore.

There is nothing particularly devastating in the entire evening. The music is appealing without being intrusive, there is no overpowering production number, the laughs are not explosive and there isn't a strong, professional voice in the entire company.

But the proceedings are shot with charm. The sets are simple and unostentatious and entirely delightful. The people sing and dance and read their lines with a sort of simple, old-fashioned honesty, as though they believed in and enjoyed what they're up to. This sense of delight seemed to transmit itself to last night's audience, which held up the festivities at regular intervals with sustained applause.

The authors, Victor Wolfson and Stella Unger, have used just enough of the old "Seventh Heaven" legend to string the numbers together. Diane, the little Montmartre entertainer, is given haven by Chico, king of the Paris sewers.

She falls in love with him, but he feels she is unworthy of being his wife. She walks out. He follows her. The First World War breaks out. He enlists. They perform their own marriage ceremony on the platform as the train leaves for the front. Etc. for another act.

Sense of Delight Abounds in Play

Gloria Appealing

As the girl, Gloria DeHaven is as cute and appealing as a pink bedroom slipper. She has a small, not particularly-well regimented voice, but she manages to get her numbers across with sincerity and a certain style, and her acting is pleasant and unpretentious.

Ricardo Montalban, as Chico, exudes Latin appeal, makes capital of his own rather limited vocal equipment by wisely maintaining a modest delivery. Kurt Kasznar, the cab driver who presents the story, is gay, ebullient and quite funny.

Robert Clary, the diminutive French import, provides added comedy and song. His number with Patricia Hammerlee, "Love Sneaks Up on You," is one of the high spots of the second act. Added citations should be given Gerianne Raphael, Beatrice Arthur, and, especially, Chita Rivera (a dancing fugitive from "Shoestring Revue.")

Victor Young's "Where Is That Someone for Me?" and "If It's a Dream" are good ballads and will probably catch on; there is a nifty closing number for the first act, "Glove Dance," and a tender little ballet, "Chico's Reverie," later on. In fact, there isn't a dreary interlude in the whole evening. The choreography by Peter Gennaro is bright if not downright dazzling and John C. Wilson, who did the overall directing, has managed to sustain this same quality of effortless enthusiasm throughout.

"Seventh Heaven" will not go down in the records as the "greatest," but it should be around, in its mild and unassuming manner, for many a month to come.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
May 27, 1955

THEATER

'Seventh Heaven'

By WALTER F. KERR

EVELYN WAUGH once remarked of a certain film company that it employed a group of experts to study each new property bought by the studio, isolate the precise quality that made it successful, and kill it. I'm terribly afraid that something like that has happened to "Seventh Heaven."

Not that the new musical at the ANTA Theater is incompetent on all counts. It has a certain professional slickness in a good many directions: the company is polished and workmanlike, the production numbers boast a decent amount of what the lyrics would inventively call "joie de vivre," the costumes by Vertes are sometimes very flashy indeed.

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But the one thing that "Seventh Heaven" has had all the years—in memory, anyway—is a fond, schmaltzy innocence, an honest and wistful and appealing grade of corn. This is the quality that librettists Victor Wolfson and Stella Unger have apparently been afraid of, and they have pared it away to make room for a commodity often referred to as "sex."

That Paris cul-de-sac that houses Chico and Diane is now "the lowest spot in town," a dreamy little section in which red-headed madames, mustachioed pimps, and energetic street-gazelles frolic on the sidewalk, make it tough for a virtuous little night-club singer (Diane), and carol the sort of up-to-date refrain that asks "if sex is bad, how can it be so good?" In this new vision, the split skirt is de rigeur, even on a bridal gown. And Diane and Chico meet—formally—in bed.

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I don't want to mislead you. For all its determination to seem new-hat and reasonable red-hot, "Seventh Heaven" does not really capture the sort of sizzle that has been known to drive good family men to fatal distraction. Its zing is a little too calculated, and a little too mechanical, for that. What it does do is smear just enough mascara on its simple little face to keep you from believing in stars, garrets, a hero who wants to be a street-cleaner, and a girl who meets him in dreamland every night at eleven o'clock.

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Gloria de Haven, making her local debut, is the Diane of this version. She is a confident girl with an appealing singing voice and an Alice-in Wonderland look about her. There is, however, a certain sleek styling in her vocal delivery that suggests Alice has been doing the night-clubs, and the naivite that once made Diane so foolishly endearing loses ground all over again.

Ricardo Montalban makes a swarthy, acceptably swashbuckling Chico, putting a shrug, a swagger, and a kindly sneer to good use. Better still is the diminutive Robert Clary, skating impishly about the stage in stolen boots, disappearing down sewers with lavish four-course dinners, bouncing gaily through a ditty called "Happy Little Crook." Kurt Kasznar's taxi-driver is effortlessly engaging, with no help at all from the very mild drolleries written for him. And Chita Rivera is wonderfully explosive in a series of much too similar high-kicking routines.

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But for all the sprightliness of the street gamins, the cozy glow is missing. Victor Young's melodies lack a sentimental sweep, Stella Unger's lyrics stick close to the "Darling, why does my heart beat faster?" pattern, and the elaborate Vertes settings seem to me curiously, but emphatically, wrong. These splashy and very free renderings of cloud-crested stairways, flowing sewers, and geranium-shaped stars have a boldness of line that is at least courageous; but it is so loose a line that it seems to have no root in anything that ever existed. It doesn't suggest a garret: it suggests scenery. With it, another fragment of old-fashioned charm disappears.

The New York Times
May 27, 1955

Theatre: 'Seventh Heaven' Set to Music

Romance in New Guise Opens at the ANTA

By LEWIS FUNKE

THAT sentimental confection that Austin Strong called "Seventh Heaven" and served to a palpitating generation following World War I is back among us in a new guise. As a musical play, created by Victor Wolfson and Stella Unger, and bedecked in a sweet and tuneful score by Victor Young, it arrived at the ANTA Theatre last night.

But that palpitating generation is hereby warned that besides the musical dress some other alterations have been made in the love idyl they tenderly cherish. In the original play, as well as in the moving picture that catapulted Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell into the hearts of all sweethearts throughout our land, Diane was a poor, sweet creature of the streets, a thief and a cheat. And to add to her woe she was regularly beaten by a drunken sister. In the present incarnation she does not have a sister and she is a fancy lady, though, make no mistake about it, she really does not want to be. She still is sweet and the sewer man learns to love her.

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The change in Diane is not entirely fortuitous. Somehow it robs the role of some of its old sympathy. And the introduction of the bawdy houses and their toilers causes a disconcerting intrusion. Apparently not quite trusting the sad little tale itself Mr. Wolfson and Mrs. Unger have mixed in sex in no uncertain terms. They call their work a musical play. But to this theatregoer at least it seems they also were striving for musical comedy. The potpourri has the unfortunate quality of mocking itself.

Mr. Young has been happier in his part of composer. He has created some touchingly tender songs such as "Where Is That Someone For Me?", "If It's a Dream" and "Man With a Dream." He also has put forth some sound rhythmic numbers that can make the feet move. And for the most part he has a cast that can catch the spirit of his efforts.

DeHaven, Kasznar and Montalban Star

His two leading players, however, are not so helpful as would be desired. Neither Gloria DeHaven nor Ricardo Montalban, from Hollywood, are able to project the full quality of the score. In Hollywood such handicaps are easily mastered. On the Broadway stage performers have to stand alone. But Miss DeHaven and Mr. Montalban are pleasant players—she as Diane, as lovely as a cameo, dainty and affecting; he as that remarkable sewer man Chico, manfully surly and vain, handsome and intense. They make a fetching couple even though it is a little difficult to believe in their romance.

Among those present also are Kurt Kasznar and Robert Clary. Mr. Kasznar's talents are not fully utilized but Mr. Clary has some lively moments. So do Gerrianne Raphael, Patricia Hammerlee and Chita Rivera, who can get the full vigor and emphasis on fundamental facts out of choreographer Peter Gennaro's bouncy dance routines.

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The production is colorful, if not astounding, with Marcel Vertes supplying a series of attractive musical comedy sets and gay, appropriate costumes. A. H. Feder has lighted the proceedings with discernment. And presiding over all has been John C. Wilson, whose direction cannot be faulted. He has provided plenty of gusto in the big street scenes and apparently drawn just about all he could from his charges.

Undoubtedly "Seventh Heaven" has a proper place in the hearts of an older generation. But this edition is too much of a melange to retain the old mood. Love is eternal. Apparently not "Seventh Heaven."

Daily Mirror

May 27, 1955

'Seventh Heaven' as Musical Proves a Socko at the ANTA

By FRANK QUINN

Broadway got itself a big, lusty, bouncy hit with the arrival Thursday night of the musical version of "Seventh Heaven." Producers Gant Gaither and William Bacher have taken the Austin Strong play and woven a gay, bawdy and colorful creation which should have a highly successful run at the ANTA.

VICTOR YOUNG has written a score which is destined to reach wide popularity and Stella Unger has created lyrics that all singers will be rushing to put on wax. This combo did a real tuneful show that has rhythm and heart.

Gloria DeHaven and Ricardo Montalban are the lovers of the pre-World War I Paris vintage. Gloria is a dream, a loveable street walker who falls for the sewer-street cleaner. In song she is delightful, making "Where Is That Someone for Me?" and "If Its a Dream" wonderful listening. As the star she is heavenly, making Diane a beloved girl.

Montalban bares his broad, brown chest and swaggers as the man who seeks purity but finally weds Diane. He is the boastful hero who goes to war, loses his disbelief in divine power and returns to the waiting arms as a blind soldier.

SCENERY AND costumes by Vertes are exciting, bright and revealing.

Chita Rivera is a gal of flashy, bold personality. This long-stemmed miss is a thrilling dancer who struts and slinks like a panther. She does a howl of a routine with her calypso can-can. She is magnetic and catches the eye with her every movement.

J. C. Wilson has directed with zip. There are a few draggy spots in the first act but it picks up momentum in the second stanza.

PETER GENNARO created the choreography and has staged his routines with plenty of flesh showing. He has a healthy group of people with attractive anatomies which are bared in sensuous stepping.

All the members of the cast are bright and pleasant performers. It is a large company and we single out Kurt Kasnar, the operator of the aged taxi; Robert Clary, the mite crook and pal of Ricardo; Patricia Hammerlee, the baby-faced wench; Gerrianne Raphael, her sister of the streets; Beatrice Arthur, the madam.

"Seventh Heaven" is earthy, saucy, tuneful, and flamboyant. We agree with Winchell that it's a bright hit.

"Once Upon a Tailor"

DAILY NEWS

May 24, 1955

'Once Upon a Tailor' Quaint, but Not Quaint Enough as a Comedy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

A rather odd little play called "Once Upon a Tailor" was presented at the Cort Theatre last evening by the Playwrights' Company and George Boroff. I would say its aim is to be a gentle, Jewish folk idyll, and much of it is gentle, Jewish, idyllic and humorous, and it has a beguiling performance by Oscar Karlweis in the central role. Its aim is good but unfortunately not true, and it strikes me as a puzzling combination of "The Fifth Season" and "Peer Gynt." It can be admired in bits and pieces but not as a whole.

On the admirable side is Karlweis' playing of a starvation-poor tailor in Galicia about 75 years ago—a man who can be gallant enough to be funny even when his stomach is void. On the interesting but dubious side s a curious setting by Boris Aronson, depicting the tailor's cottage and its hilly background, which is all upsy-downsy, sidesy-widesy and slantsy-fancy, with more nooks, crannies and crooked stairways than an actor should be subjected to. So much of the furniture is cut on a bias that the actors last evening were skittish about where to plant their bottoms, lest one bottom slip off.

Laboriously quaint

I found also an interesting performance by Jimmy Oster, who looks like a teen-age Harpo Marx and, like Harpo, is a mute in the play. Instead of harping, he plays a recorder, and very nicely, too. Also worthy of attention is some incidental music by Sol Kaplan, and there are pleasant subsidiary performances by Anita Cooper, Anne Hegira, Adelaide Klein and others—and the costumes by Paul Morrison are quite fascinating.

But all these things don't make much of a play, because there isn't much of a play for them to be in. Baruch Lumet's story is a rather laboriously quaint one about this Galician tailor who becomes a matchmaker in order to earn some desperately needed money. His matchmaking goes wrong, for two young lovers spurn dowries and other family arrangements. But, smiling and shrugging and throwing away laugh lines as only Karlweis can do it, the little fellow keeps dogging along to the end. In the end, of course, he is happy, for all idylls are happy. But it takes him and the play too long to get to the end. Gertrude Berg has written better Jewish folk idylls about people we know and love right here and now, the Goldbergs.

"ONCE UPON A TAILOR"

Play by Baruch Lumet, adapted by Henry Sherman; staged by Joseph Anthony; scenery by Boris Aronson; lighting and costumes by Paul Morrison; presented by the Playwrights' Company and George Boroff at the Cort Theatre, May 23, 1955. The cast:

Sheindel.....Anita Cooper
Sorelle.....Anne Hegira
Frenzl.....Oscar Karlweis
Leibel.....Jimmy Oster
Chana Bayle.....Adelaide Klein
Bertzl.....Peter Fernandez
Elka.....Rebecca Darke
Mechel.....Milton Selzer

New York Post

May 24, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

Mild Little Fable About a Tailor

Under the mildly cryptic title of "Once Upon a Tailor," a modest little Jewish folk comedy by Baruch Lumet arrived last night at the Cort Theater. It is such an amiable and well-meaning play, so gentle and friendly and good-natured, and it possesses so many attributes of the good deed shining in a naughty world, that it would be pleasant to be able to say a cheering word on its behalf today. But I'm afraid the truth is that it is pretty much a well-intentioned bore.

It all takes place in a Galician village in the Austria of 75 years ago. The central figure is, not altogether astonishingly, a tailor, proud of his needle craft and scornful of the new-fangled sewing machine. But progress is getting the better of him and things are going so badly that he is forced to try earning some money as a matchmaker. He has a chance to make a profit by arranging the marriage between a young violinist and a rich girl, and would you believe it, all the time the boy is really in love with the tailor's pretty daughter?

Man With Troubles

That's virtually all there is to it, but I should think it might well have been enough to make for a warm, winning and charming comedy. Yet my impression is that it doesn't work out this happily. For one thing, despite the kindly playing of Oscar Karlweis, the tailor doesn't emerge as quite the engaging and lovable old fellow he should be. He's likable enough when his problems are fairly minor, but when the troubles accumulated, I thought he tended to be a little unpleasant.

Then, too, there are several scenes which should have been quietly but genuinely funny, and turned out to be only very mildly so. For example, there is the episode in which the tailor, given a valuable piece of goods by a well-to-do matron out of which to make her a gown, alcoholicly burns a hole in the garment and tries to persuade the lady he has i n v e n t e d something new in fashions. I can't say it resulted in exactly a masterpiece of whimsical buffoonery.

The Setting

A great deal of care seems to have gone into the production. There is a striking and rather elaborate set designed by Boris Aronson for the tailor's home and its surroundings, even though I had a little trouble figuring just where the house ended and the grounds began. And, while it may be a quibble, I wish Joseph Anthony's direction hadn't included the scene where the apprentice finds an important letter, and the tailor and his wife keep brushing him off when he tries to hand it to them.

Mr. Karlweis gives his usual pleasant performance, and Anne Hegira, substituting at brief notice for the ailing Jennie Goldstein, plays the tailor's understanding wife admirably. But I thought the most attractive portrayal was offered by Anita Cooper, who is earnest, charming and spirited as the pretty daughter. Jimmy Oster makes a credible character of the speechless apprentice, and Peter Fernandez, Adelaide Klein, Milton Selzer and Rebecca Darke are satisfactory in the other roles. But "Once Upon a Tailor" is not an enlivening comedy.

New York Herald Tribune

May 24, 1955

THEATER

'Once Upon a Tailor'

By WALTER F. KERR

ANY play in which the characters keep talking about "a hundred and fifty guldens" probably has one strike on it. Any play in which a character sits cross-legged on a roof, near an extra large sunflower, probably has two strikes on it. And any play in which an elfin mute curls up in a corner and winsomely fingers a woodwind instrument probably has three strikes on it.

But three is not enough for "Once Upon a Tailor." It plunges recklessly on. In telling its alarmingly simple and achingly quaint little story about an Austrian tailor who is forced to turn matchmaker, it gives us glimpses of a lovelorn girl plaiting her hair, a worried father scurrying onto the premises with a live chicken under his arm, a young suitor who can never enter without a violin case clutched to his breast.

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There is a time, in the second act, when this hot-blooded fellow is persuaded to part with his violin. It is then, in a gesture of Daliesque abandon, hung on a tree. But nearly all of the visual images in the new piece at the Cort have this air of misguided surrealism about them. Boris Aronson, excellent designer that he is, has somehow been cajoled into filling the proscenium with a whole hillside of twisting roadways, dipping clotheslines, rickety fences, old-world smokestacks, and arrogant birdhouses. Toward the end of the evening the entire panorama is put to use: a tug-of-war takes place, with some of the tuggers doing their tugging in the living room, the others grunting toward the horizon. It's a fascinating spectacle to watch, but it doesn't suggest much that is poetic or charming or even reasonable.

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What has happened to a play that is rumored to have run fifteen months in Los Angeles and that has indicated enough merit, somewhere along the line, to interest the Playwrights' Company? On the available evidence, it's hard to say. Baruch Lumet, who wrote it, and Henry Sherman, who rewrote it, do not seem to have the sort of folk-philosophy flair that makes Sholom Aleichem a treasure-chest of homely jewels.

This is the Aleichem formula: A peasant family having money troubles, romantic troubles, more troubles than can be sanely dealt with—and seeing them all through with a foolish, endearing shrug. But the wit has been watered down to "Remember that one hand washes the other," or "The skin is closer than the shirt," or if I got it right, "Fortune without wisdom is a bagful of hope."

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Once in a while tailor Oscar Karlweis, wearing a fringe of beard that makes him look like Vienna's answer to Menasha Skulnik, gets a line that doesn't stick in his throat. His wife snarls, "It takes you longer to sew a dress than it took God to put the world together." Mr. Karlweis rolls his tongue in his cheek, glances out at the world, and murmers "So look at it."

But these grace-notes are rare, and they do not add up to anything that might once have seemed promising. If something of value has disappeared in the process of getting the show across the country to Broadway, it can only have been a note of unaffected reality or honest belief that some other actors, and some other directors, managed to pump into the play.

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In its present mounting, artifice is superimposed on artifice. Nothing—not the picture-book setting, the deportment of the players under Joseph Anthony's direction, the music that heralds the entrance of each new character—is anchored to any kind of solid earth. The evening simply evaporates in an excess of self-conscious style; its fancy feathers drifting off into echoing space.

Apart from Mr. Karlweis—whose worn smile and helpless hands are occasionally affecting—the company is sadly undistinguished. Anne Hegira, called in to replace the ailing Jennie Goldstein on very short notice, labors appealingly to give a long-suffering wife some shred of truth; unfortunately, she is plainly unprepared. Of the others, I thought only Anita Cooper succeeded in salvaging a touching moment: one in which she improvises a woodland wedding for her all too ardent musician.

"Once Upon a Tailor" is a sigh of a play—a long, low, falling sigh that no quixotic little shrug can redeem.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

May 24, 1955

'Tailor' Cuts Pattern To Austria of '80s

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The new contender at the Cort, called "Once Upon a Tailor," is an archaic little comedy with excellent intentions.

It seems terribly old-fashioned, not so much because it is set 75 years ago in Austria as because it is all plot and next to no character.

It seems that this tailor is doing very badly. A rich bore in town offers him some money to arrange a marriage for her daughter. The young blade aimed at is the beloved of the tailor's daughter, too.

He needs the money because his other daughter, though soon due for motherhood, is being sent home because he has failed to pay her dowry.

There is a good deal of incidental comedy about a ballgown the tailor is making for his client.

Oscar Karlweis is starred as the tailor. He does his best to give the old-fashioned show vitality. This is often wildly funny, but it does not cure the artificiality of the play.

Anne Hegira plays his wife, having taken over the role only very recently, at the sudden illness of Jennie Goldstein. Miss Hegira does a remarkably sincere job. She puts heart and gentleness into a character which could often seem shrewdish.

As the daughter and her beau, Anita Cooper and Peter Fernandez provide the play with one of its pleasantest interludes, a naive love scene in the forest. They are romantic and charming.

Boris Aronson has done a gingerbread set most suitable for the play.

Journal American

May 24, 1955

Story Thread Dull in Play

But Star Oscar Karlweis Shines In Poorly Put Together Drama

By JOHN McCLAIN

A NEW PLAY BEARING the singular title, "Once Upon a Tailor," made its appearance last night at the Cort Theatre and made a determined though futile effort to interest the audience in the problems of a dressmaker living in Galicia, circa 1880.

This was meant to be a winsome mood piece, replete with Jewish homespun humor not unlike "The Flowering Peach," but the writing is unfortunately pedestrian and the performances, with the exception of Oscar Karlweis, the star, are something short of inspirational.

The fault here seems to be the one most commonly encountered in the theatre: one is not made to care particularly what happens to the characters. A small-town tailor, on the brink of bankruptcy, sees a solution to all his problems if he can arrange a match between the son of a competitor and the daughter of a wealthy widow. But then he discovers that his own daughter is in love with the lad, and vice versa.

Used for Years

This is a perfectly workable premise (it should be, having been used successfully at intervals through the years), but in this instance there is nothing particularly ingenious in its development and there is never the slightest doubt about the outcome. Even so, it might have a chance with jet-injected dialogue, delivered by a cast more skilled in this form of old-world whimsey.

Oscar Karlweis, who shoulders most of the load, is an ingratiating and highly competent comedian who is able to establish a mood of righteous resignation to his ill fortune which, if the lines and his supporting players sustained, might have made for a more happy evening.

But before the proceedings are long under way the action bogs down in a series of contrived charades and meandering bits of philosophy which rob the characters of their validity. Toward the end of the second act, one wishes the boy would run away with the girl and let everybody go home.

'Often Silly'

It seemed to me that the direction of the play was highly intrusive. This, again, was probably an effort to create the sort of gentle, middle-European mood which might have carried the lustreless script. Instead it was more often silly. I agree that a straight soliloquy is apt to be dull, but it is really reaching when the girl is required to deliver one while lying on her back with both bare legs in the air.

In that connection I was not exactly transported by the performance of either Anita Cooper as the girl or Anne Hegira as the mother. They both were handicapped by dreary parts but neither brought any particular enthusiasm to them. Boris Aronson devised a complicated multi-level cottage and surrounding real estate, and a pleasant forest glade.

"Once Upon a Tailor" enjoyed a pleasant and profitable run on the West Coast, I am told, but the chances of its survival here seem very slim indeed. It just doesn't come off.